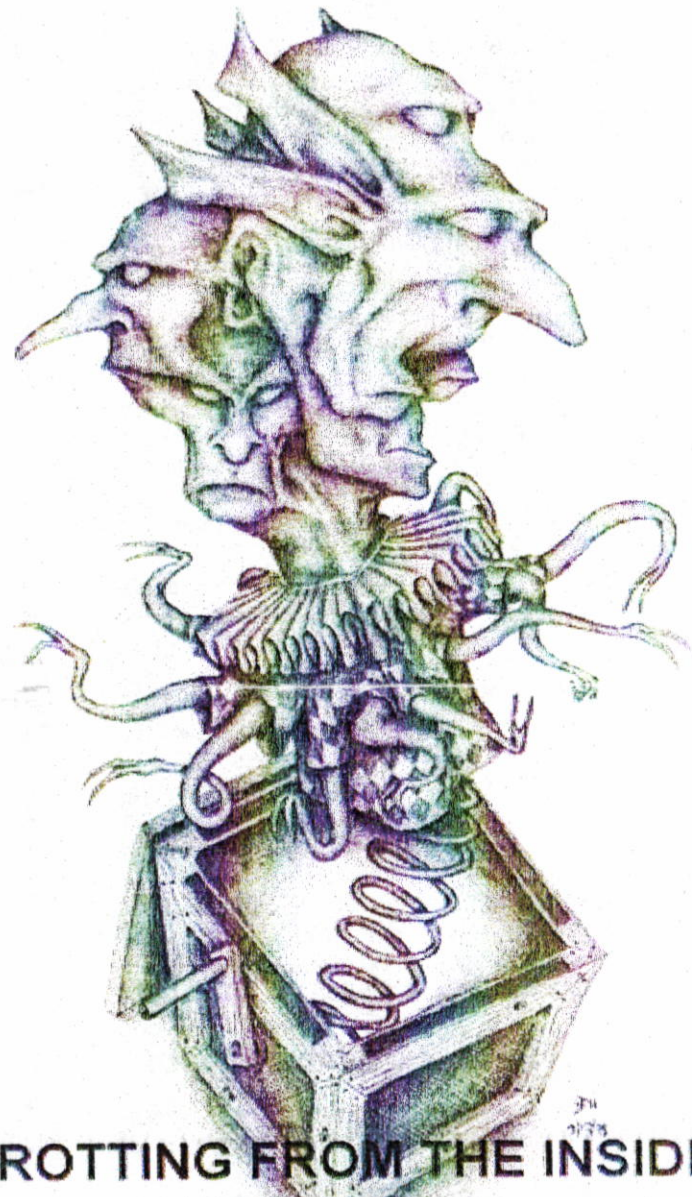


few minutes ". He wandered off in the direction of Poppy's looking
for people who weren't there.
I collected my pack and caught a bus to the airport to get my
plane home.
As it drifted down the runway I thought "I bet he will haunt houses
when he dies"

Contact
R.F.T.I.
Po Box 5817
West End Qld
Australia 4101
Prodigal_hobo@yahoo.com



ROTTING FROM THE INSIDE
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Cover by Brian Hudson

Gulliver's Travels

Every long weekend, Christmas, Easter or any other Hallmark holiday that got us a paid day off work a group of us would go on a surf trip to Wye River. The group would vary in size from six to twenty over the duration of the stay. Wye River is 15 kilometers past Lorne on the Great Ocean Road in Victoria Australia. It consists of a river (duh), a general store, a country fire authority depot, a surf life saving club, two camping grounds, a surf beach and last but definitely not least, a pub.

Many long amber fluid intake exercises were performed in that pub if the surf was flat. After one of these sessions in particular we left The Rubbery Chook, that's not the actual name of the pub, it is called the Rookery Nook but alcohol consumption and boredom leads to calling things different names. Anyway, we left and headed back to the camp site. We sat around drinking and talking about how expensive sitting in the pub is compared to surfing. A few were hoping for the surf to pick up the next day so they could avoid the inevitable over consumption of the loud mouth soup.

Now balance is always an issue when in this state. Some people handle it better than others. I preferred not to move too much and play the law of averages. I figured the more I tried to stand the more chance of falling. JH had already proven this by falling into the river three times in the last four nights. It was fairly sedate around the camp fire and then we heard the noise and crashing of what can only be described as the man mountain known as Moose. Now Moose is a big guy and when unsteady on his feet can cause more damage than a swinging demolition ball. With a bottle of rum almost empty in hand and doing the last lager waltz I have no idea how we managed to avoid the fire. He bounced off cars, fell off chairs and was fast becoming a potential threat to destroying some of the tents. As amusing as it was to watch, this was Victoria, bloody cold and no one was going to want to sleep under the stars if it could be helped.

He wasn't heeding any call just to sit down for a while. It was only a matter of time before someone got very pissed off with Moose. But what can you do with someone that big and intoxicated, I had put any solution into the too hard basket. I then saw Homy rustling around in the boot of his car. He had one of those grins on his face that only meant something was going to happen and it wasn't going to happen to him. Then before I knew it Homy, who is built like a bear crash tackled Moose and pinning him to the ground. He called for assistance in holding down Moose. We jumped and grabbed a limb each. Homy then produced the instruments to aid us in our efforts. A large mallet and a bag of

eighteen locals. Then Kiwi started droning on about the different ticket prices for boats.

"You can pay 16,000 or 1,000 or I think even 10,000 Rupiah ay" he started. "You can charter a boat, go for a day trip. But I didn't want a day trip I am staying longer ay, I wonder if you can get a boat on your own ay, I wonder how much that is ay"

I said "You got the cheapest possible ticket what is your issue?"

"It's just amazing ay"

"Yeah fucking mind blowing" I sighed.

I noticed on the boat that there were only four lifejackets and they were secured to a beam with thick wire that would require bolt cutters to remove them. I asked the crewman why this was so and he dutifully informed me "So they don't get stolen". Fair enough I thought. I turned to Kiwi with a sly grin and asked.

"Can you swim?"

"Nar, not too good ay" was the reply.

He looked at me confusingly and I couldn't help but laugh.

The island called Trawangan is only three kilometers square and almost pancake flat except for a hill at one end. One morning a group of us decided to walk around the island before it got too hot. Kiwi came bouncing along like a puppy off its leash. On the far side of the island you could think you were the only people on Earth. Uninhabited, peaceful, silent. Then Kiwi starts up with his "Chess Board" story as he has a new audience. It crossed my mind that I could drown him here and the chances of being caught were minimal. It would be a mercy killing anyway. Over the next few days he managed to annoy the living shit out of everyone who came into direct contact with him. Most of us were heading off the island the next day and he asked the group what time boat had we decided to catch in the morning.

There was a slight silent pause.

I jumped in and said "The 9:00am boat" A few people went to correct me but then wised up real quick. The next morning everyone but Kiwi was on the 7:00am boat to peace and quiet. I traveled for the next two weeks without crossing paths with Kiwi. It was getting near the end of my stay so I headed back to Bali for my last few days. On my last day I was heading to a little place that does the best fried noodles with veggies in Bali to have one last feast before going home. I was about to walk in and heard "Hey ! I slept in and missed the boat ay. Didn't manage to catch up"

"Gee shit that's bad luck we thought you left before us" I said.

Before he could talk I pointed to another food place and said "Hey there is a bunch of us about to have a feed around the corner at Poppy's. I just have to change some money so I will be there in a

To make a long story short I asked "So how much did you pay?" "Well ay" he replies "He told me another price, higher than what I offered so I increased my price a little ay"

"Yeah, so how much did you end up paying?" I tried again.

"He didn't like my offer but he reduced his price slightly ay"

Ok as far as I was concerned this story was taking far too long and no one around the table needed to be explained how bartering works. Especially in increments of Rupiah. The Indonesian currency. The Swiss Couple were just staring at him like he was mentally disturbed.

After about thirty minutes he finally got to the part where he and the Carver reached an agreement on price. Hoping to get a result on the story I said

"So that's what you paid huh?"

"No" he says "I didn't buy it because I don't play chess"

Well there were moans and groans all round and I am sure more than half the people sitting at the surrounding tables heard me loudly sigh "Oh, for fuck's sake". I have to avoid this guy I thought. Either he will shit me to tears or I will kill him.

The next day I leave the bungalows as I am leaving Lombok to stay a few days on a small Island to the North West called Trawangan. I enter one of the many places offering transport to the port. I buy my ticket and the lady informs me that the bus will be about half an hour and to come and sit down out the front. She offers me a 'complimentary' Coca Cola which 'costs' me 1,000 Rupiah?!

The bus trip was relatively uneventful and I arrive at the port. I go to the hut that was the booking office for boats across to the small islands. There are a few options they tell me and offer me two.

1. Find three other people and pay 16,000 Rupiah each and charter a boat immediately. Or
2. Pay 1,000 Rupiah, put your name down on a list for the public boat.

I took option 2.

Now the public boat requires 20 people to sign on before it will depart. I spy a bar and decide I will wait in there. As I walk to the bar entertaining the thought of an ice cold beer I hear.

"You catching the public boat too ay?"

Your fucking kidding me I thought. Shit, there in the flesh was Kiwi with that shit eating grin on his face waiting for the same boat to depart. Thankfully it wasn't too long until they had twenty names so I downed the beer and headed to the boat. The boat was a long, high sided canoe kind of thing with a home made motor. I sat on my pack to get comfortable as I could. This made it difficult because the boat is supposed to carry twenty people and two crew. In fact it carried twenty back packers, two crew and

large tent pegs. We started with his legs. Pulling out the legs of his jeans we hammered pegs through them deep into the ground. Moose was calling us every name under the sun and stating how much his jeans cost. We held his arms out placing large pegs over his wrists. I was sure Homy was going to cause a serious injury. He was lifting that mallet way to high and smashing down with considerable force. How he was so accurate I don't know. Then through Moose's T-shirt more pegs went. We even had tent ropes across his body and connected to pegs for added security. After exerting a bucket load of energy we had him pinned. Just like Gulliver.

He was a little annoyed you could say but the village (well campsite) was safe once more. Every time he started to incoherently complain some one would pour whatever available booze there was into his mouth.

He became quite the attraction that night as more and more people filtered out of the Rubbery Chook and headed back to their camp sites. In hindsight we could have made a killing charging five bucks a look.

There are some photographs of this momentous occasion so maybe I could do a children's picture book some day.

Night Moves

When we first arrived in Queensland we did a lot of moving around until J and I found a place we could consider a permanent residence for a while. We were staying out in fucking Redneck City at the time and it was driving us crazy. It is just one of those places that if you have the means to leave, you move. We went to a punk show up close to the city one weekend and bumped into some old friends from New South Wales. They had migrated north about a year before hand. We couldn't have timed things better. They were actually looking to rent out one of the rooms in their house. We didn't need much time to think about it. It was a Saturday afternoon that arrangements were discussed and we packed the van and moved out of the Land of the Inbreds and up closer to the city on the following Tuesday.

As I mention before the timing was good. Our friends were going away two days later for about a week and we solved their problem of looking for some one to feed their pets. It was weird having a large house to ourselves after spending the last year either sleeping at friend's houses or in the campervan. Being an old house and in a warm and humid climate the wooden beams would creak and crack as the temperature rose and fell. This gave me more than a few jumps during the night. For some reason I have always been a little high strung when sleeping.

At the time I was reading the book Hell's Angels by Hunter S. Thompson. There is some pretty disturbing material in that book. But not as disturbing as some books I have read. For some reason I have never learnt to not to read books of a morbid nature prior to going to sleep. This has caused many a nightmare, cold sweats and jumping awake during the night.

So after a day of sweltering heat and a long evening of Hunter S. Thompson I decided it was time to go to bed and inspect the inside of my eye lids. Most of the windows were open and the electric fan was on. The front and back doors were locked.

Now the cat our friends own used to be a stray. Like most cats it pretty much does what it wants when it wants and meows when it needs feeding. It had its own little ramp to a window so she can get in and out of the house.

I always have weird sleeps when I rest on my back. I don't seem to sleep. Well it is like my body rests while my ears don't and my brain does whatever it wants. I slightly remember dreaming about something from the Hells' Angels book. Something not very nice thank you very much Mr. Hunter fucking S. Thompson.

I am not sure what the time was but before I knew I was up out of bed screaming at the top of my lungs trying to open the bedroom door. I believe I was yelling "just fuck off and leave us alone, fuck off, just fucking fuck off" at the top of my voice. I also had picked up my baseball bat that was beside the bed. I have two objects that are usually in arms reach when I sleep to help satisfy the hunger of my paranoia. The first I call "The Persuader" It is a full length Maglite torch like the police use. The second is called "The Attitude Adjuster" which is my baseball bat. So here I am waking the entire neighborhood with screaming to wake the dead and language to give those of "faith" a cardiac arrest and think the Four Horsemen have begun to ride.

The noise was brutal that had disturbed me. Smashing, crashing and screaming all coming from inside the house. Now this just wasn't the beams cracking. I opened the bedroom door and switched the light on. There was still screaming and the kitchen table being bumped around. Remember now I haven't quite woken up. I did wake up with J in a panic yelling at me "What the fuck is going on?" well what a question that was. Here I was in my boxer shorts with a baseball bat and no idea what was going on. An eerie silence fell over the house. I was confused as ever. When I ventured out to investigate my heart was still pounding from adrenaline. My eyes bulging from my head. J was close behind.

The outcome was another cat had followed our friend's cat into the house. They decided that 1:00am was a good time to have the title fight for the vacant Psycho Cat Title Belt on offer. It must

have been brutal. Furniture had moved, there was cat piss and fur all over the floor. The only reassuring thing was the fur was of different color to that of our friend's cat.

Once we cleaned up we headed back to bed. I was stuffed. That had really taken it out of me and I was still jumpier than a frog on heat. We lay down, then J started to snicker, then giggle and before I knew it we were laughing our heads off. What must the neighbors have thought? I am surprised the cops hadn't been called and I for one didn't really want to try and explain it to them either. The men in white coats would have come for me next and let me rest in a nice padded cell after repeating this story to a humorless cop on nightshift.

We were a bit worried when the cat didn't come home for over thirty six hours. How was that going to make us look? Two people who claim to have been excellent at looking after animals lose a cat in a matter of days.

The cat came home with no damage whatsoever and a hunger like a lion. What was a shit scary event turned into a story that was told to our friends when they got home and to many friends after. It is often hard to laugh at things when you have been the center of attention but sometimes you just can't help it.

I still read warped books at night.

The Kiwi

Sometimes you meet people who you are sure are put on this earth just to test you. Now I believe I am a pretty easy going kind of person and make acquaintances fairly easily. But then you meet someone who just becomes so annoying that the only solution is strangulation.

When I was backpacking in Indonesia I came across a person who fits perfectly into the mold the type of person that annoys me. It started one night when myself and a group of other backpackers were sitting around the bungalows we were staying at swapping travel stories, talking about where we were from and of course who scored the best purchase through the crazy barter system they have in Indonesia. A guy from New Zealand, I will call him Kiwi, joined the group. Now Kiwi talked so slow it was like a Zen Buddhist chant. On top of that almost every sentence ended in the word "Ay". Pronounced like "Hay" without the 'H'. He started telling his story of bartering with an Indonesian Carver for a hand carved chess board and pieces. I can tell you these sets are pretty impressive. So after a piece by piece description he got to the all important barter section of the story. He slowly retold the events along the lines of.

"And he told me his price ay. But I thought that was too high ay. So I offered him a lower price ay"